



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Apostle Islands
National Lakeshore

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Apostle Islands News Release

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Apostle Islands Sea Caves Open for Winter Viewing

Colder than normal temperatures created an early freeze up of the waters around the Apostle Islands this year. This includes the area near the mainland unit of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore featuring some of the most spectacular cliffs and sea caves found in the Great Lakes. For the first time since 2009, park rangers determined on January 15 that ice conditions allow over-ice travel to these mainland sea caves.

Special thanks go to the Town of Bell, Friends of the Apostle Islands and the Bayfield Chamber of Commerce for their generous assistance in keeping the sea caves open. Due to severe budget cuts, the park was no longer able to keep the parking lot plowed and bring back seasonal staff to provide assistance and safety information to visitors. The Town of Bell stepped up and has been keeping the Meyers Beach road and parking lot plowed and the Friends of the Apostle Islands and Bayfield Chamber of Commerce is providing financial assistance.

Park staff goes to great lengths to determine when ice conditions permit access to the sea caves. Conditions are regularly viewed from the shore as the ice pack develops. Images of the lake are posted hourly on the Sea Caves Watch website (<http://wavesatseacaves.cee.wisc.edu/index.htm>). As the ice thickens, rangers cut holes in the ice near the sea caves to determine the quality and thickness of the ice. Satellite images help indicate the extent of the ice pack around the islands. The lake ice must be in place for two weeks and thick enough before the public is notified that the sea caves are accessible. The 24-hour "Apostle Islands Ice Line" at 715-779-3397 ext. 3 provides visitors with current ice conditions at the mainland sea caves.

The sea caves can be reached from the end of Meyers Road, 18 miles west of Bayfield off State Highway 13. There is a \$3 daily fee for parking a vehicle at Meyers Road. Mawikwe Bay near Meyers Beach in Apostle Islands National Lakeshore's mainland unit may be covered with ice for some or all of the period from mid-January to late March. When frigid temperatures turn the surface of Lake Superior into a frozen white expanse, lakeshore cliffs form a crimson border to

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this arctic landscape. Pillars of ice extend to cliff tops where waterfalls have hardened in place. Frozen lake water encrusts the base of the cliffs while inside the caves is a fairyland of needle-like icicles. Ice formations change constantly with the weather. Thousands of visitors walk, ski, or snowshoe to explore the caves when ice conditions allow. Snowmobiles, ATV's, and motorized vehicles are not allowed on the ice near the mainland sea caves.

Walking on a frozen lake is an inherently dangerous thing to do. Ice conditions can change rapidly, so it is important to keep safety in mind at all times. High wind speeds, such as those forecast for the near future, is a factor that can quickly change conditions and cause decreased visibility. Visitors must prepare for cold conditions and possible extreme wind chill. Wear sturdy waterproof boots. Carry a ski pole or walking stick, or use traction devices like Yaktrax or Stabilicers to prevent slipping. All visitors are encouraged to watch for newly formed cracks, slushy areas, or thin spots in the lake ice. Beware of ice formations falling from the cliffs. Pets must be on a leash and under control at all times. Pet owners must properly dispose of pet excrement in trash receptacles. Finally, don't forget a camera to take home a tangible reminder of this spectacular landscape.

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